Do you wanna go to the river (please don't go.)
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Richard Cameron, Charlie Dalton, Neil Perry (Dead Poets Society), John Keating, Steven Meeks, Gerard Pitts, Knox Overstreet, Todd Anderson

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Do you wanna go to the river (please don't go.)

by louisbloom

Summary

If you ask the others, Cameron's always been fine-steady,dependable, a little annoying maybe, but fine. If you ask Neil, Cameron's drowning. No one's asking Neil.

Notes

I wrote this in less than an hour. Part of the title is from Free Treasure by Adrienne Lenker.

Cameron sits at the edge of the group, knees close together, spine straight as though he's afraid of creasing the air. Laughter ripples through the cave like wind through trees-wild and uncontained-but it never quite seems to touch him.
Todd's leaning into Neil, cheeks flushed from poetry and the cold. Charlie's sprawled across Knox's legs, cigarette in hand, pontificating on sex and freedom and how rules are meant to be broken. Meeks and Pitts are already halfway to building something electrical just because they can.
Cameron doesn't speak. He clutches his copy of Five Centuries of Verse like it might save him, though no one notices he hasn't read aloud in weeks.

No one but Neil.

"Do you want to read something?" Neil asks one, quietly. Kindly.
Cameron shakes his head, too fast. "No, I'm good."
"You sure?"
Cameron shakes his head again, a little too hard. "Yeah. Totally."
Neil hesitates. Doesn't push.
No one else says anything.

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It's not one big thing, it never is. It's the little things.

Todd forgetting to hand him the notes from Keating's last class. Charlie snorting when Cameron speaks up in class, brushing him off with a "God, shut up Cameron." Meeks avoiding his eyes after Cameron asks to help with the radio again. Small, quiet rejections that did in deeper than they're meant.
And Keating, though a kind man, doesn't see it. Not really. He claps Cameron's back the same as the others, gives the came "Carpe diem!" speech without noticing Cameron never looks anyone in the eye anymore.

Neil notices.
How his hands tremble when he turns pages, how his plates still have food on them at the end of meals. How he takes a little longer to leave class, like a lingering ghost.
"You okay?" Neil asks one night, alone in Cameron and Charlie's dorm while the others are at their extracurriculars. "You seem kind of... I don't know. Off." Cameron's smile is practiced. Too smooth.
"I'm fine. Just tired." It isn't physical.

"You're always tired."
"I have a lot of work."
Neil sits on Charlie's bed, hesitating before speaking. "You don't have to be alone, you know."
"I'm not." He is.
"But you are," Neil's voice is soft. Careful. "They don't get it but I-"
"I don't need pity," Cameron speaks too sharply, instantly regrets it.
"Sorry. That was rude." Neil only nods, his eyes full of something Cameron doesn't see. Wouldn't be able to name if he had.

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It unravels fast after that.
Cameron stops going to the cave meetings, he promises not to snitch. Stops raising his hand in class. Stops laughing. Stops showing up to anything he's not mandated to attend. No one says much, no one says anything. Charlie mutters about how Cameron's always been uptight. Todd shrugs. Meeks says he's probably just busy.
Neil doesn't believe them. He corners Keating after class one afternoon. "Sir, I'm worried about Cameron."
Keating frowns, "Why? Has he said something?"
"No," Neil says with frustration bleeding into his voice. "But he's not- he's not okay. He's fading, like... sinking?"
Keating rubs his chin. "I'll talk to him."

But he doesn't. Not soon enough.

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It's early morning, the kind of cold that bites at your bones, and the dorms are mostly asleep. The only sound is the soft rustling of pages from the open window that's letting the morning breeze in. Charlie's only up because he'd drank too much water last night and his bladder had woken him. The hallway is quiet as he returns to his and Cameron's room. Cameron should be up by now, he usually is. Cameron hasn't been coming out lately, just staying in the dorm. And even Charlie's noticed.
"Cam? Y'up?" He's expecting some sort of awkward response, Cameron telling him to get lost. There's no response.

He looks over at Cameron. It takes his eyes a minute to adjust to the darkness from the bathroom lights brightness. He's sitting in the back corner of his bed, back against the wall. He's pale for sure, but this... he's too pale. The sheets around him are stained dark, red. Soaked through. The mess is quiet but loud in the silence of the room.

Charlie's mouth goes dry as he realises what he's looking at.

Cameron's just sitting there, his hands hang limp at his sides. His expression is empty, completely drained like he's already gone. Charlie doesn't move. His body freezes, heart pounding so loud in his ears he can hardly hear anything else. This isn't real. This can't be real. He stumbles forward, clumsy and shakes Cameron's shoulder. "Hey, Cam... Cam? What the hell?" Cameron's head tips slightly, his eyes flickering up for a brief moment before they sink again, unfocused, far away. "Cameron?" Charlie's voice cracks. He doesn't know what to do. "Come on, come on. Don't do this." The desperation hits Charlie too late. Cameron's lips twitch, but it's more grimace than it is smile. He sees the blood now. God, there's so much of it. So much. All from Cameron's wrists, crisscrossed with slices old and new, the freshest ones red and raw, and they're not really clotting. A bloodied razor sits just next to his hand, slick... forgotten.
Cameron's voice is hardly even an audible whisper. "I didn't... mean to. I just wanted it to... stop."
Charlie doesn't understand at first. He doesn't understand the words. Doesn't get why Cameron would say something like that. Charlie's always been the loud one, the jokester. The world was supposed to make sense.
"Cam..." Charlie's voice breaks, trembling as he leans over Cameron's bed and places his hands on Cameron's shoulders, trying to shake him awake. He's just sleepwalking. Sleepwalking. Sleepwalking. Sleepwalking. Sleepwalking. Trying to pull him out of this.

But Cameron doesn't move.

He doesn't fight back. Just allows himself to be pulled, limp and heavy in Charlie's hands. "Shit, shit. Shit!" Charlie's frantic now, pushing at Cameron's chest. "You gotta wake up! Come on, help me. Somebody... Neil, anyone!" But no one comes.
Cameron lifts his head just enough to meet Charlie's, he's never seen eyes so empty. So far gone.
"Charlie," Cameron rasps. Barely a whisper. Like it's like the last word he has left. "I'm... I didn't mean... for you to..."
"I know. I know, it's okay. I'm here. I've got you." Cameron doesn't cry. Doesn't panic. He just blinks slowly, like he's body's too tired to keep trying. His head tilts to the side, resting limply against Charlie's chest. "Should've seen," he murmurs. "No one saw."

"I see you now" Charlie whisper, his hand strokes Cameron's hair without thinking, fingers trembling.

It's too late.

"I'm sorry. I am. Please, please don't leave me."
Cameron breathes again. Shallower. Slower. His eyes roll slightly, eyelids heavy. "Tired."
"No, no, no, no. Stay awake. Stay with me, yeah? I'm gonna get help, I'll get Neil. You'll be okay, just stay-" Cameron shifts in his arms, just a flicker of movement. His hand curls weakly into Charlie's white sleep shirt like a child.
"Hurts less," he whispers. "Finally."
And then-

Stillness.

No final cry, or real words. No drama. A soft exhale.

Cameron, the one who used to try so hard to be seen, is now only an empty shell, crumpled into the corner of the room like he never existed at all. Charlie feels the cold press into his bones, and the weight of the silence falls over him like a crushing wave. This isn't how this is supposed to go.
Charlie swallows, his vision blurring with something hot and unfamiliar-guilt. Anger. Sorrow.
He's supposed to do something, say something, but all he can do is stare down at Cameron's lifeless face, barely able to comprehend what's happened. Too late. Too damn late. The others will never understand.

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